

## ■ NIGERIA

# The many programmes and the many poor



Despite various attempts to combat poverty through government programmes, 70% of the population continue to live on less than USD 1 a day. Women face prejudice and traditional practices which limit their access to credit and land and make it nearly impossible to escape from poverty. The question now is whether the 5 year-old National Poverty Eradication Programme and the new National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy can make real progress or whether these programmes will also be sabotaged by corruption and over-bureaucratization like others in the past.

### Social Watch Nigeria<sup>1</sup>

#### Poverty and gender equality

Poverty and gender inequality are inextricably linked in Nigeria, with both being widespread throughout the country. Poverty reinforces gender inequality and gender inequality accentuates poverty. This invariably means that gender equality can be used as a weapon to tackle poverty and that so long as inequality remains widespread, poverty will remain an intractable obstacle to the achievement of the international objectives contained in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Millennium Development Goals.

Poverty in Nigeria goes beyond living on less than USD 1 a day. Given the cost of living in the country, USD 1 (NGN 132.85) is grossly insufficient to take care of the basic necessities of food, water and transportation even if we assume that other necessities such as shelter, clothing, and healthcare do not require financial resources on a daily basis. Yet officially 70% of the country's population live on less than USD 1 a day.<sup>2</sup>

#### Manifestations of poverty

Hunger is the most glaring evidence of poverty in the country with many people unable to afford a daily balanced diet. Nigeria's Human Development Report indicates that the very poor spend 75% of their total income on food.<sup>3</sup> The United States Agency for International Development reports that "Poor nutrition invariably leads to widespread illnesses and disease, both made acute by poor health care".<sup>4</sup> Poverty also manifests itself in lack of access to food and water,

education, adequate health care, adequate housing, employment and political participation. Poverty makes it difficult for people to participate effectively not only in political but also cultural, social, economic and other activities. Therefore marginalized people do not contribute to policies and decisions which shape their lives and communities.

#### Attempts to tackle poverty

There have been a number of initiatives aimed at tackling poverty. These include the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure, the Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme, Better Life for Rural Dwellers, Operation Feed the Nation and universal primary education. The poverty situation referred to above illustrates that these and other programmes have failed to achieve their objectives. Their failures can be attributed to "decades of corruption and mismanagement especially during the military administrations."<sup>5</sup> These "previous poverty reduction programmes did not reach the poor; they were opportunities to provide 'a job for the boys', distribute patronage, and promote parochial interests."<sup>6</sup>

NAPEP was initiated by the federal Government in 2000. It coordinates and monitors the activities of 14 core poverty alleviation ministries and 37 core poverty alleviation parastatals and agencies. It is the most ambitious of the programmes to date but is not fairing any better than its predecessors. The programme classifies poverty eradication activities into four schemes. These are the Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), the Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme, the Social Welfare Services Scheme and Natural Resources Development and Conservation Scheme. The most popular of these schemes, YES, is comprised of the Capacity Acquisition Programme and Mandatory Attachment Programme.

The Civil Society Coalition on Poverty Eradication evaluated the NAPEP in 2003 and observed that "as with most human institutions, NAPEP came

across as having its own strengths and weaknesses. Its strengths include a coherent and coordinated poverty reduction policy, its inherent potential and actual positive impact on human lives; government support; international support; and a vigilant civil society. However, NAPEP suffers a number of weaknesses: over-bureaucratization; poor specification of assets; implementation gap; and a weak bottom-up participatory approach judged against best practices and the principles of the PRSP process."<sup>7</sup>

The Government's interest in the programme appears to be waning as illustrated by its financial contribution. In 2000, NAPEP was allocated NGN 10 billion (USD 75 million)<sup>8</sup> while in 2001 and 2002, its allocation declined to NGN 5 billion (USD 37 million) and NGN 2 billion (USD 15 million) respectively. The programme must also compete not only with other social spending but also with debt servicing which represented 12.4% of all exports in 2001.<sup>9</sup>

A poverty eradication initiative called the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) has also been incorporated into the country's new Medium Term Economic Framework 2003-2004. There are several criticisms of the NEEDS, especially from civil society. It must be applauded however for its efforts to include the state and local governments, and its encouragement of these levels of government to evolve their own poverty eradication strategies which take local circumstances into consideration. In the past, lower levels of government would have been forced to adopt and implement the federal model.

The goals of the NEEDS are wealth creation, employment generation, poverty reduction and the reorientation of values. These goals are meant to be achieved through the reform of government and

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2 UNDP. *Human Development Report 2004. Cultural liberty in today's diverse world*, 2004a, <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2004/>

3 UNDP. *HIV/AIDS A Challenge to Sustainable Human Development*, 2004b, [www.undp.org/ng/Publications.htm](http://www.undp.org/ng/Publications.htm)

4 US Agency for International Development. "OTI country programs. Nigeria", [www.usaid.gov/hum\\_response/oti/country/nigeria/rpt0901.html](http://www.usaid.gov/hum_response/oti/country/nigeria/rpt0901.html)

5 The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) Secretariat, *Nigeria: National Economic Development and Empowerment Strategy*, Draft Document, Nigeria, March 2004, p. 22.

6 "Communiqué/Report of the Poverty Reduction Strategies Workshop of the Economic Reform Program of Shelter Rights Initiative", *SEBN NEWS*, Vol. 1 No. 4, October-December 2002, p. 23.

7 Ogwumike, Fidelis O and Remi Medupin, *Performance Evaluation of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)*, Abuja, 2003, p. vii.

8 There was an outcry that this money was largely misappropriated, that the process of selecting beneficiaries of the Youth Empowerment Scheme and the Mandatory Attachment Programme was politicized, and that the beneficiaries were mostly the ruling party's jobbers. The head of the fund disbursement committee was the then Minister of Works, a well known politician who is today the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the ruling party and who headed the party's Presidential Election Committee.

9 *World Guide 2005/2006*. Montevideo: Third World Institute, 2005, p. 422.

institutions, growth of the private sector and the implementation of a social charter which has human development as its agenda.<sup>10</sup> There are targets attached to these goals including a reduction in the incidence of poverty, and the creation of a minimum number of new jobs. The poverty reduction target is 5% per year, equal to a 25% reduction by 2007 while the target for job creation is 7 million by the same year<sup>11</sup>. The NEEDS also includes targets related to social services including raising adult literacy from its current rate of 57% to 65% and expanding immunization coverage from 39% to 60%. The access to safe water target is 70%, not far from the estimated 64.1% of the population which now have access to this basic need.<sup>12</sup>

However a year after the launch of the NEEDS there is no authentic information against which its success or failure can be judged. This fuels the fear that the NEEDS is not immune from corruption. Cases of official corruption are now reported with disturbing regularity which means that the same problems that led to the failure of past poverty eradication programmes are also bedeviling present efforts.<sup>13</sup> This is not surprising when one considers that Nigeria is ranked as the third most corrupt country on an index which includes 146 countries.<sup>14</sup>

### The gender issue

Men and women play different roles in every society. In a patriarchal society such as Nigeria these differences harm women, which explains why poverty not only affects men and women differently but affects women more intensely. Women are traditionally expected to perform domestic chores and reproductive activities. For this reason, they are the least educated and thus more vulnerable to poverty. While the literacy rate for men in 2002 stood at 74%, it was only 59% for women.<sup>15</sup> In 1997, average net primary school enrolment was 57% for boys and 44% for girls while the post primary school enrolment for 1996 was 57% for boys and 47% for girls.<sup>16</sup> If employment is used as an indicator of poverty, women are also at a disadvantage because there are more

men than women in paid employment and the domestic chores and reproductive activities of the majority of women are not remunerated. The International Labour Organization measured women's labour force participation rate at 48.9% in 1995 as compared to the 87.5% participation rate of men.<sup>17</sup>

In political participation there is also great disparity between men and women. In appointed positions, the target of 30% women's representation has not been met at any level of government in the country. The disparity is even wider in elected office. In the 1999 elections, "of the 11,881 available positions throughout the country in that year, women contested only 631. Out of these, a total of 181 positions were won by women, which came to a mere 1.62% of the total contested positions."<sup>18</sup> In 2003, three women were elected into the 109 member Senate - the highest legislative house in the country - while 21 women were elected into the 360 member House of Representatives.<sup>19</sup> These few women are there to represent the 51% of the population that is female - roughly 65 million people.<sup>20</sup>

Numbers aside, the role of women in society is vital even if their work generally goes unremunerated. In addition to domestic work women engage in economic activities such as farming and trading. Even in families where the man is the proverbial bread winner, the income from these ventures subsidizes food and health expenses on a daily basis. The work of women as homemakers is equally important. They take care of the elderly, the sick, the children and the men by cooking food, fetching water, washing clothes, and cleaning the house, among other activities. Saddled with these traditional roles and undermined by discriminatory practices, it is not surprising that women are the most impoverished members of society.

### Accounting for the disparities

There are several factors responsible for the disparities mentioned above, such as women having limited access to credit. Since they lack financial empowerment, they must approach credit facilities to support their economic activities. However credit institutions - where available - are reluctant to extend their services to them. The reluctance stems from a prejudice that women are bad managers of funds and would not be able to repay the loan. Those willing to extend services to women insist on male guarantors. However many men, because of the same prejudice, are not eager to play that role. Moreover, due to lack of information many women are not aware of when and where credit is available.

Women's lack of access to land is another major contributor to gender disparity. While men can automatically inherit land from their parents, wives, and children cultural restraints prohibit women - in their role as wives, mothers or daughters - from doing so. Their only option is to purchase land but given their financial handicap, this is hardly an alternative.

Cultural norms do not only inhibit women from inheriting land. Traditionally upon the death of her husband, a widow is dispossessed of all of her husband's property, which is distributed among the husband's male relatives. One state in the country, Enugu, enacted a law in 2001 forbidding this practice. However there has been no enforcement of the law and the practice remains widespread. Other states and the federal Government carry on as if they were not aware of the tradition.

The fact that gender is not considered in budgeting also contributes to the gender disparity which fuels poverty. Policies, programmes, and activities affect men and women differently because of the different roles they play in society. These differences should be taken into consideration when budgets are being drawn up but unfortunately this does not occur and budgets remain gender blind. Issues that could improve female enrolment in schools, for example, are therefore not effectively addressed in budgets.

Even the Constitution contributes to the low status of women instead of upholding their right to equal treatment. It leaves much to be desired in terms of gender equality; even the language of the Constitution is masculine, with the pronoun "he" used 235 times mostly to refer to men and women.<sup>21</sup> Its other shortcomings include the failure to make socioeconomic rights enforceable and to make explicit the age of marriage for women. The Constitution only contains an inchoate definition of discrimination in relation to women; it fails to clarify its position on who is an indigene when women marry outside of their ethnic group; and it does not explain the citizenship rights of non-Nigerian men married to Nigerian women.

Several groups have litigated and undertaken campaigns and other advocacy strategies to draw attention to the human rights violations highlighted in this report. There are also networks which disaggregate budgets at the various levels of government on the basis of gender. There is consensus among all those working in this field that the heavy debt burden, both external and internal, constitutes a serious impediment to the capacity of the Government to provide for the needs of women and empower them economically. It is generally accepted, therefore, that it will take the full efforts of Nigeria and its development partners to improve the plight of women. ■

10 NEEDS, *op cit*, p. 10.

11 *Ibid*, p. 13.

12 *Ibid*, p. 14.

13 Since the beginning of 2005, an Inspector General has been forced to resign his position and has been arraigned in court for allegedly stealing NGN 10 billion (USD 75.27 million). The Education Minister as well as his Housing counterpart have also been dismissed for corrupt practices. The former, along with a former Senate President who was also forced to resign, and other principal officers of the federal legislator, have also been arraigned in court for bribery. The legislators allegedly demanded and received a NGN 55 million (USD 414,000) bribe from the Minister as a condition for not reducing the education budget for 2005.

14 Transparency International. "Corruption Perceptions Index 2004", [www.transparency.org/cpi/2004/cpi2004.en.html](http://www.transparency.org/cpi/2004/cpi2004.en.html)

15 UNDP (2004a), *op cit*.

16 The National Core Team for the PRSP Project, *Federal Republic of Nigeria, Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, 2001, p. 10.

17 International Labour Organization. "Nigeria Labour Force Participation Rate", [www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/gems/eeo/download/nigeria.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/gems/eeo/download/nigeria.pdf)

18 Akiode-Afolabi, Abiola and Lanre Arogundade, Editors, *Gender Audit 2003 Election*, Women Advocate Research and Documentation Center, 2003, p. 63.

19 *Ibid*, p. 95.

20 World Bank. "Genderstats. Nigeria", 2000, <http://genderstats.worldbank.org/genderRpt.asp?rpt=basic&cty=NGA,Nigeria&hm=home2>

21 "Close Up the Gaps, A Position Paper on Gender and Constitution Reform in Nigeria", Gender and Constitution Reform Network.